Of Revelation and the Messias.

A

SERMON

Preached at the

Publick Commencement

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to His MAJESTY.

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1 PET. III. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the Hope that is in you.

BY the *Hope that is in us*, we do understand here, as in other places of Scripture, not only the bare Hope strictly so called, but the Faith too of a Christian. Whence it is, that in the Syriac version of the text, and in some ancient Latin copies, the word Faith is added to the other; *the hope and the Faith that is in you.* And indeed if we consider Hope as a natural passion; we shall find it to be always attended and usher'd in by Faith. For 'tis certain, there is no Hope without some antecedent Belief, that the thing hoped for may come to pass; and the strength and steadiness of our Hope is ever proportional to the measure of our Faith. It appears therefore why the word Hope in the text may with sufficient propriety of speech comprehend the whole Faith of a Christian; and that, when the Apostle exhorts us, *to be ready always to answer every man that asks the reason of our Hope*; 'tis the same,

as if he injoined us, to be never unprepared nor unwilling to reply to any doubts or queſtions about the grounds of the Chriſtian Faith.

At the date of this Epiſtle, the whole World (with relation to the text) might be conſider'd under one general diviſion, Jews and Gentiles: Firſt, the
Rom. 3. 2. Jews, *To whom the Oracles of God were committed*, and who from thence had the information and expectation of the Meſſias. Theſe, when they asked a Chriſtian the reaſon of his Hope, were themſelves already perſuaded, that the Meſſias would come: and the only controverſie between them was, Whether *Jeſus* was He? according to the meſſage of *John* the
Luk. 7. 19. Baptiſt, *Was Jeſus he that ſhould come, or muſt they look for another?* Secondly, the Gentiles, who having no means of knowledge beſides mere natural Reaſon, could have no notions nor notices of this expected Meſſias. Theſe therefore, when they demanded the reaſon of a Chriſtian's Hope, were firſt to be acquainted with the purpoſe and promiſe of God to ſend the Meſſias, were to be inſtructed about the reaſons and deſigns of that great embaſſy; about his quality and office, and all the circumſtances of his Perſon: and then was the proper time to ſhew, That *Jeſus* was He; that the deſcription of the Meſſias was truly exhibited and repreſented in His character; and the ancient prophecies all accompliſh'd in His actions and events.

'Tis

'Tis not for nothing, that the Apoſtle ſo preſſeth this advice in the text, *Be ready* always *to give a reaſon of the hope that is in you.* As if he had foretold, That there would be no age of the Chriſtian world, wherein this preparation would be ſuperfluous. It hath pleas'd the divine Wiſdom, never yet to leave Chriſtianity wholly at leaſure from oppoſers; but to give its profeſſors that perpetual exerciſe of their induſtry and zeal. And who can tell, if without ſuch adverſaries to rouſe and quicken them, they might not in long tract of time have grown remiſs in the duties, and ignorant in the doctrines of Religion? Perhaps before this time even ſome of the Records of it might have periſh'd by mens negligence: as the Jews had like to have loſt their Law, if divine Providence had not preſerved one copy of it in the Temple. It is, *while men ſleep*, while they live in peace and ſecurity, and have no enemies to conteſt with, that the great *Enemy comes and ſowes tares among the wheat.* But of all the ages ſince the coming of Chriſt, I ſuppoſe this preſent has leaſt reaſon to complain for want of work and imployment in defence of Religion. Here are not only the two parties in the text, Jews and Gentiles, ſtill in the world to engage with; but even in the midſt of Chriſtianity are the moſt dangerous deſigns form'd againſt it: as if our Saviour's prediction of particular Matth. 13. 25.

lar families were to be verified too of the whole
Matth. 10. 36. Church, *That its worſt enemies ſhould be they of its own Houſhold.*

There are a ſort of perſons baptized indeed into the Chriſtian Faith, and educated in the profeſſion of it: but in ſecret, I wiſh I might ſay ſo, nay even openly they oppoſe and blaſpheme it; repudiating at once the whole authority of Revelation, and debaſing the ſacred Volumes to the rank of ordinary Books of Hiſtory and Ethicks. The being of God and a Providence they profeſs to believe, to acknowledge a difference between Good and Evil, to be verily perſuaded of another Life to come; and to have their expectations of that ſtate, as their behaviour is in this. Nay even the whole ſyſtem of Chriſtian Morals they can willingly embrace: but not as a collection of divine Statutes and Ordinances ſent us by an expreſs from Heaven, but only as uſefull rules of life, diſcoverable by plain Reaſon, and agreeable to natural Religion. So that they cannot ſee the mighty occaſion, that ſhould invite even the eternal Son of God from the boſom of the Father, to act ſo mean and calamitous a part upon the ſtage of this ſorry world. What need of ſo great a maſter to read mankind lectures of Morals, which they might eaſily learn without any teacher? 'Tis true, they are often told of ſome ſublime myſterious doctrines

doctrines deliver'd by him, which they own would ne'er have been thought of by natural Reaſon. But then, that is ſo far from recommending to them the importance of his errand from Heaven; that for that very reaſon they deny the truth of his meſſage. For whatever comes imperiouſly in the name of divine Myſtery, and ſoars above the pitch of humane knowledge, whatſoever things they cannot fathom and graſp through all the cauſes, deſigns, modes and relations of them, as the notion of the Meſſias, his incarnation, mediation, ſatisfaction; all theſe they reject and explode, as incomprehenſible to pure Reaſon, which they ſet up as the only principle and meaſure of belief.

In all this, theſe perſons act the part, and place themſelves in the condition of Gentiles, whom we may imagine in the text, *to ask the reaſon of a Chriſtians hope*: ſince the whole body of theſe mens Religion is no more than what even Heathens attain'd to: the modern Deiſm being the very ſame with old Philoſophical Paganiſm, only aggravated and damn'd with the additional crime of Apoſtacy from the Faith. But beſides this, theſe very perſons will on other occaſions perſonate the Jews too, thoſe other enquirers ſuppos'd in the text; and diſpute with Jewiſh objections againſt the Chriſtian Religion: though they no more believe the matter of thoſe objections,

objections, than the thing they object againſt: like *Celſus* and *Julian* of old, that gather'd arguments againſt the Chriſtians from all the different Sects and Hypotheſes of Philoſophy, though inconſiſtent one argument with another; and brought objections too from the Old Teſtament, which they did not believe, againſt the New one, which they were engaged by all methods to oppoſe.

In our preſent Diſcourſe therefore, we ſhall endeavour to refute theſe modern adverſaries under their double ſhape and character: firſt as they are mere Deiſts or Pagans, renouncing all Revelation, and the very notion of the Meſſias: and ſecondly, as they fight under Jewiſh colours; ſo as admitting, there be a promiſed Meſſias the Saviour of the world, yet men ought to reject the perſon of *Jeſus*, and ſtill to wait for another.

I. And firſt we ſhall conſider them in the quality of Deiſts and Diſciples of mere natural Reaſon. We profeſs our ſelves as much concerned, and as truly as themſelves are, for the uſe and authority of Reaſon in controverſies of Faith. We look upon right Reaſon, as the native lamp of the ſoul, placed and kindled there by our Creator, to conduct us in the whole courſe of our judgments and actions. True Reaſon, like its divine Author, never is it ſelf deceived, nor ever deceives any man. Even Revelation

lation it ſelf is not ſhy nor unwilling to aſcribe its own firſt credit and fundamental authority to the teſt and teſtimony of Reaſon. Sound Reaſon is the touchſtone to diſtinguiſh that pure and genuine gold from baſer metals; Revelation truly divine from impoſture and enthuſiaſm. So that the Chriſtian Religion is ſo far from declining or fearing the ſtricteſt trials of Reaſon; that it every-where appeals to it, is defended and ſupported by it, and indeed cannot continue, in the Apoſtle's deſcription, *pure and undefiled* without it. 'Tis the benefit of Reaſon alone, under the providence and ſpirit of God, that we our ſelves are at this day a Reformed Orthodox Church: that we departed from the errors of Popery, and that we knew too where to ſtop; neither running into the extravagancies of Fanaticiſm, nor ſliding into the indifferency of Libertiniſm. Whatſoever therefore is inconſiſtent with natural Reaſon, can never be juſtly impoſed, as an Article of Faith. That the ſame Body is in many places at once; that plain Bread is not Bread; ſuch things, though they be ſaid with never ſo much pomp, and claim to infallibility; we have ſtill greater authority to reject them, as being contrary to common ſenſe and our natural faculties, as ſubverting the foundations of all Faith, even the grounds of their own credit, and all the principles of civil life. James 1. 27.

So far are we from contending with our adverſaries about the dignity and authority of Reaſon: but then we differ with them about the exerciſe of it, and the extent of its province. For the Deiſts there ſtop and ſet bounds to their Faith; where Reaſon, their only guide, does not lead the way further and walk along before them. We on the
Deut. 34. contrary, as *Moſes* was ſhewn by divine power a true ſight of the promiſed Land, though himſelf could not paſs over to it: ſo we think, Reaſon may receive from Revelation ſome further diſcoveries and new proſpects of things, and be fully convinced of the reality of them; though it ſelf cannot paſs on, nor travel thoſe regions, cannot penetrate the fund of thoſe truths, nor advance to the utmoſt bounds of them. For there is certainly a wide difference between what is contrary to Reaſon, and what is ſuperior to it, and out of its reach. To give an inſtance in created Nature: how many things are there, whoſe being we cannot doubt of, though unable to comprehend the manner of their being ſo? That the human ſoul is vitally united to the Body by a reciprocal commerce of action and paſſion; this we all conſciouſly feel and know, and our adverſaries will affirm it. Let them tell us then, what is the chain, the cement, the magnetiſm, what they will call it, the inviſible

inviſible tie of that union, whereby Matter and an incorporeal Mind, things that have no ſimilitude nor alliance to each other, can ſo ſympathize by a mutual league of motion and ſenſation? No, they will not pretend to that; for they can frame no conceptions of it. They are ſure, there is ſuch an union from the operations and effects: but the cauſe and the manner of it are too ſubtle and ſecret to be diſcovered by the eye of Reaſon; 'tis myſtery, 'tis divine magick, 'tis natural miracle. If then in created beings, they are content with us, to confeſs their ignorance of the modes of exiſtence, without doubting of things themſelves: have not we much more reaſon to be humble and modeſt in ſpeculations about the eſſence of God, about the reaſons of His counſels, and the ways of His actions? yes certainly: under thoſe circumſtances we may believe with Reaſon even things above and beyond Reaſon.

For example: If we have ſure ground to believe that ſuch a book is the Revelation of God; and we find in it Propoſitions expreſſed in plain words, of a determinate ſenſe without ambiguity; ſo as they cannot be otherwiſe interpreted, by any juſt metaphor or fair conſtruction allowed in common language: we ſay we have ſufficient reaſon to aſſent to thoſe propoſitions, as divine doctrines and

infallible truths, ſo far as they are declared there; though perhaps we cannot our ſelves comprehend, nor demonſtrate to others, the reaſons and the manner of them. Neither is this an eaſy credulity, or unworthy of the moſt cautious and moroſe ſearcher of truth. For obſerve; we do not ſay, Any thing incomprehenſible to Reaſon is ſeparate and alone a proper object of belief: but as it is ſupported and eſtabliſh'd by ſome other known and comprehenſible truth. As, if *Abraham* had been told by ſome ordinary Man, That in His and *Sarah*'s decrepit age he ſhould be bleſſed with a Son: this Promiſe ſo alone, without its baſis to ſtand on, could not have challeng'd his aſſent; becauſe the thing was impoſſible in the way of Nature. But ſince it was God Almighty, *with whom all things are poſſible*, that was the author of that Promiſe; by the mediation of that certain truth, the veracity and omnipotence of God, without heſitation he believed, and ſo obtain'd the glory to be *Father of the faithfull.* And upon the ſame grounds the Bleſſed Virgin gave credit to the ſalutation of the Angel; though the meſſage in it ſelf ſeem'd impoſſible to reaſon. So true it is, that Reaſon it ſelf warrants us to proceed and advance by Faith, even beyond the ſphere and regions of Reaſon. We agree then with our adverſaries about the

Matth. 19. 26.

Rom. 4. 11.

the authority of Reaſon: but we diſſent about the exerciſe of it, and the bounds of its juriſdiction. We believe even the abſtruſeſt Myſteries of the Chriſtian Religion: of which myſteries perhaps we can aſſign no reaſons; but for our belief we aſſign a good one: Becauſe they are plainly taught in the word of God, who can neither err nor deceive. And this we affirm to be a reaſonable concluſion; though it carry us even to the confines of Heaven, beyond the limits of Reaſon. But if the Deiſts think to oblige us to give a natural account of thoſe myſteries, without the authority of Scripture: for that we muſt beg their excuſe. We will argue from ſtrict Reaſon, as much as they can pretend to: but we muſt not ſubmit that our adverſaries ſhall confine us to improper topicks and impoſſible ways of proof.

It appears therefore, that though we ſhould decline and deſpair to give any account at all of the reaſons and methods of God's counſel in the miſſion of his Son; and only appeal to the ſentence of Scripture: yet the Deiſts ought to be ſatisfied with that proof; ſince the Doctrine is ſo expreſly taught in the oracles of God. But beſides this, what if even natural Light ſhall diſcover to us ſome faint, but yet certain views of that myſterious inſtance of divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs; and exhibit

hibit to us a rational account, Why the Son of God ſhould condeſcend to be our Mediator and Redeemer. But before we engage in this attempt, let it be lawfull to implore the candor of our Friends; if, while we endeavour to win over our Enemies, we may ſeem to ſome, To do too little, or perhaps to others, To venture too far, and to advance beyond our Lines. To diſcern then ſome reaſons of this wonderfull Myſtery; we muſt take our proſpect from the higheſt mountain of Nature, from the firſt Creation, and origin of human Race.

GOD, who at the beginning viewed all the works of his hands, and *behold, all things were very good*; made Man alſo upright and compleat, without any defect in his whole compoſition, without any original perverſneſs of Soul, or falſe byaſs of Will or Judgment, without any natural obliquity or enormity of Inclinations. He made him an intelligent Being, to know God and Himſelf: to underſtand and feel preſent happineſs, and to ſecure it by conſideration and contrivance for the future. He endow'd him with liberty of mind: that he might act, not of neceſſity, nor blind inſtinct like the Brutes; but with conſciouſneſs and voluntary choice. He implanted in him diverſe Appetites and Affections, all uſefull inſtruments of his

Gen. 1.31.

his happineſs, if fitly imployed: and none vitious and culpable radically and in their whole nature; but then only, when they are applied to wrong objects, or in right ones are raiſed or ſunk beſide their due temper and meaſure. I ſay it again, for the juſtification of our Creator; that not one of the ſimple affections of the Soul, no not Concupiſcence, Hatred, Anger, Revenge, are in themſelves criminal and ſinfull. Some of the Affections, 'tis true, have very bad names: but thoſe are either mere exceſſes of ſimple Paſſions; or elſe mix'd and compound ones, which have no proper real eſſence, but are only notional terms; as *Envy* for example, a very bad thing indeed; but 'tis an evil of our own product, and not of God's creating. For the real conſtituent parts of it, are Hatred and Grief, very uſefull and lawfull affections: but the evil of it is our own; when we entertain that Hatred and Grief at the good that befalls others: which is what we expreſs by the complex name of Envy.

God therefore having ſo created Man, in every capacity pure and perfect, might juſtly require of him, that he ſhould maintain and preſerve this original rectitude; that in all his deſires, deſigns and actions, he ſhould conſtantly adhere to the dictates of Reaſon and Nature; ſo as the leaſt deviation

viation would make him obnoxious to God's diſpleaſure, and nothing leſs than compleat obedience recommend him to his favour: according to
Gen. 4. 7. the terms propoſed to *Cain*, *If thou doſt well, ſhalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doſt not well, ſin lies at the door.* God, I ſay, might expect and require of man ſuch a perfect obedience to the Law of Nature: becauſe it was both reaſonable and poſſible for Man to perform it. *Reaſonable* it was, becauſe every Statute of that Law promotes the true intereſt and felicity of Mankind, even in the very performance. 'Tis true, in the preſent poſture of human affairs, a man's duty is frequently inconſiſtent with his temporal intereſt. *But from the beginning it was not ſo*: neither would it be now, if the whole world at once could be juſt and innocent. For 'tis not my keeping the Law, but anothers tranſgreſſing it, that involves me in any miſery. The ſcope and tendency of the Law it ſelf is always mine and every man's advantage. For 'tis not a thing foreign and aliene to our nature, impoſed on us purely to try our obedience; but it all reſults from our very frame and conſtitution. The general preſervation of man's Natural good is the ſole root and fountain of the Moral: the univerſal Profit and Pleaſure, the publick Happineſs of human Life gives being and denomination to every virtue

virtue and vice: and the true rules and directions to preſerve and ſecure that happineſs make up the whole Volume, the Code and Pandect of the Law of Nature. Without doubt then it was reaſonable to obey, where nothing was commanded us, but to purſue our own intereſt; nothing forbidden us, but not to do our ſelves harm. And ſecondly, it was *poſſible* for man to perform that entire obedience. For ſince, as we have proved before, all his natural faculties are right and good, and the Law it ſelf accommodated and proportion'd to thoſe faculties; there appears no neceſſary intrinſic impediment, why he may not adequately obſerve it. If every particular precept be poſſible to be done, 'tis not abſolutely impoſſible to fulfill the univerſal. And methinks they, that on other accounts acknowledge that God requires ſuch perfect obedience upon the terms of the Law of Nature, ſhould be very averſe from believing, that there is a natural and fundamental inſufficiency in man to perform it. For certainly the juſt God cannot be ſo importune and unreaſonable a Maſter, as to enjoyn us what is phyſically impoſſible, *to expect to reap where he has not ſown, to require Bricks without allowance of Straw.*

But then, though there was no ſuch original and natural diſability in Man; yet there aroſe a moral

and circumſtantial one, an accidental incapacity ſupervening to his Nature, an impoſſibility from event, that ever any perſon from the beginning of the world to the laſt period of it (always excepting the *Man Chriſt Jeſus*) ſhould be wholly pure and free from the contagion of Sin. For our firſt Parents having fallen from their native ſtate of innocence; the tincture of evil, like an hereditary diſeaſe, infected all their poſterity: and the leaven of ſin having once corrupted the whole Maſs of Mankind, all the ſpecies ever after would be ſowred and tainted with it; the vitious ferment perpetually diffuſing and propagating it ſelf through all generations. For let us but conſider the ſtate of human life; firſt a perpetual converſation among evil Examples, and the ſtrongeſt principle of our nature, Imitation; and then, the ignorance and prejudices of Childhood, the fervour and temerity of Youth; the force and the frequency of Temptations, and the narrow dubious conconfines between Virtue and Vice: and we may pronounce it impoſſible, that any man ſhould ſo govern his ſteps through all the lubricous paths of Life, as never once to ſlip and fall from his duty. Agreeably to the teſtimony of Scripture, *which hath concluded all under ſin*, Gal. 3. 22. and again;

1 Joh. 1. 8. *If we ſay, we have no ſin, we deceive our ſelves, and the*

the truth is not in us: and again, *both Jews and Gentiles are all under ſin; all have ſinned and come ſhort of the glory of God. Every mouth then be ſtopp'd; and all the world* muſt plead *guilty* before the tribunal of God: *for by the deeds of the Law* (the Law of nature as well as of *Moſes*) *no fleſh can be juſtified in his ſight.* It is evident then from the principles of pure Reaſon, beſide the authority of Scripture; that upon the Deiſts Hypotheſis, upon the terms of natural Religion, no Salvation can be obtain'd; no Life and Immortality can be expected. For that being the free offer and favour of God; he might juſtly ſet what price he pleas'd upon it; even the greateſt that we can poſſibly pay; nothing leſs than entire obedience, than unſpotted innocence, than conſummate virtue.

Rom. 3. 9. 23. Ib. v. 19.

Thus far then even Reaſon evinceth, and holds the Lamp to Revelation. Some means of Reconciliation between God and Man, the Judge and the Offender, muſt be contrived; ſome vicarious ſatisfaction to juſtice, and model of a new Covenant; or elſe the whole bulk of Mankind are for ever unhappy. And ſurely to prevent that, to retrieve a periſhing world, was a weighty concern; even of greater importance than the very creating it, and more worthy of the care and conſult of Heaven. I ſay, the care of Heaven; for alas here

on Earth, what expedient could Man find out? *How could Duſt and Aſhes take upon him to ſpeak unto the Lord?* Could any of the Sons of *Adam* preſume to be advocate for the reſt? himſelf one of the criminals, himſelf in want of another advocate? and what friend knew we at the court of Heaven; of that high power and favour with God, as to offer his interceſſion? or ſo wonderfully kind to Us, as to pay our ſatisfaction? We muſt freely own to the Deiſt; that here Reaſon was at a ſtand: even Nature her ſelf languiſh'd between hope and de-
Rom. 8. 22. ſpair; and in the ſtile of the Apoſtle, *the whole Creation groan'd and travell'd in pain together*; when behold (what Revelation hath informed and aſſured
Heb. 1. 3. us of) the eternal Son of the Almighty, *the brightneſs of the Paternal Glory and the expreſs image of his Subſtance*, even He vouchſafed to be our Patron and Mediator, to take our Nature upon him and to dwell among Men, to fulfill that Law of righteouſneſs wherein we were deficient, to bear our guilt and our burthen upon himſelf, and to offer his moſt precious blood, as an expiation for our offences, as the ſeal of a new Covenant better than the Law of Nature; a Covenant of more gracious terms, terms of Repentance and Remiſſion of ſins: ſo that if we truly believe in Him, and ſincerely endeavour to obſerve his Commands; our imperfect

imperfect Righteouſneſs through the merits of his Sufferings ſhall be imputed, accepted and rewarded; as if it were an entire obedience to the ſtrict Law of Works and of natural Perfection.

And now I dare preſume to ask even our adverſaries themſelves, what flaws or fallacies they can ſhew in all this. If it be true then, that Reaſon it ſelf diſcovers ſuch abſolute neceſſity of ſome way of Reconciliation between God and Man; and if it was neceſſary for Man, as being the party concern'd, to know the particular way that God did approve and accept of; and if mere Reaſon could never find that out, but Revelation alone muſt and ought to inform us; and laſtly, if ſuch Revelation be actually made, atteſted, and promulgated to the world: what pretence is there left, why we ſhould not believe and acquieſce in it? if upon examination it bear all the marks of true Revelation; if it contain nothing unworthy of it ſelf, and of the wiſdom and goodneſs of its Author.

And is not the Oeconomy of man's Salvation, as it is ſet forth in Holy Scriptures, every way agreeable to that divine character? No, if we ask our Adverſaries; 'tis an improper and unequal method; 'tis inconſiſtent with the juſtice and impartiality of God. *Rex Jupiter omnibus idem.* God, ſay they, if he had deſign'd ſuch an univerſal benefit

nefit for Mankind, would have exhibited it equally and indifferently, to every Age and Nation alike. But the conditions of Salvation propoſed in the Goſpel are incompetent and much too narrow; being reſtrain'd to thoſe times and countries alone, that can hear of the fame of *Jeſus*, and believe in his Perſon. And what becomes then of all the former Ages of men, before He was born? What of thoſe remote Nations ever ſince, that could have no intelligence of him, nor hear the leaſt tidings of *Judea* and *Jeruſalem*? muſt all thoſe Myriads of Souls periſh for invincible ignorance, for want of impoſſible Faith? *For how could they believe on him, of whom they had not heard? and how could they hear without a Preacher?* And why ſhould *the God of the whole earth, the God that is no reſpecter of perſons*, no nor of nations, be ſo unaccountably kind, ſo unjuſtly fond and partial to any ſingle country? much leſs to a little obſcure people, the *Jews*, ſcarce heard of in the reſt of the world, till they were captives and ſlaves in it? and withdraw his paternal love from ſo many other Nations much more conſiderable, and more worthy of his providence? *Is he God of the Jews only? Is he not alſo of the Gentiles?*

Rom. 10. 14.

Rom. 3. 29.

This way of diſcourſe we may expect from the Deiſts: And I hope, according to the advice of the text, we are both *able and ready to give a Reply.*

For

For firſt as to that imagined Partiality of God, in preferring any one country before the reſt of the World, to be the Land of Chriſts Nativity; what a poor and contemptible cavil? For upon ſuppoſition, that the Meſſias of God was to take human nature upon him, and be born of a Woman: muſt he not of neceſſity be born in ſome one particular Country, excluſively to all the reſt? And is not that then a ridiculous objection againſt any ſingle Country; that may equally be urged againſt all whatſoever?

Neither was it mere Fondneſs in the Deity, that he choſe the obſcure land of *Paleſtine* for the birth place of his Son, rather than *Greece*, or *Italy*, or *Aſia*, the theatres of Art and Learning, and the ſeats of Empire? For not to mention *Abraham* and the Patriarchs, whoſe ſingular faith and piety juſtly obtain'd of God, that their Poſterity ſhould have the *adoption and the glory, and the covenants and the promiſes, and the conſanguinity of Chriſt*: it appears alſo from event; that the circumſtances of that nation were of all others the moſt ſuitable to the deſign of the Meſſias. For ſince it was fit and neceſſary, that Prophecies ſhould foretell of him long before his coming; that his pedegree and extraction ſhould be accurately deduced through a long ſeries of Anceſtors; and other ſuch marks be aſ- Rom. 9. 4.

ſigned

ſigned of him, that men might know, This was He: what more proper to thoſe purpoſes, than the ſtate of the Jews, that *peculiar people*, ſecluded and diſtinguiſh'd one tribe from another, and the whole from all the reſt of Mankind, by the very frame of their polity? So that the Genealogies were leſs confuſed, the Hiſtories and Prophecies more faithfully recorded, and the accompliſhment of all more certain and illuſtrious, than they could have been in any other Nation upon Earth; all of which, within that long compaſs of time, were blended together by mutual commerce and mutual conqueſt, and other omnifarious cauſes of mixture and confuſion.

And then as to that other ſurmiſe, that God would have propoſed fair and equal means of general ſalvation; and not upon ſuch narrow and inſufficient terms, as an actual Faith in the perſon of Jeſus; a condition impoſſible to the much greater part of Mankind: we acknowledge it to be true, infallibly true; Faith in Chriſt Jeſus the only way to Salvation ſince the preaching of the Goſpel: ſo as whoſoever rejects that, when it is duly declared to him, and refuſes his aſſent and obedience to it, can have no portion in the Kingdom of Heaven. But for thoſe, that never once heard of the Lord of Life; that's an undecided caſe, which we do

do not determine. For who has authority to give ſentence, where God and Scripture are ſilent? Thus far we are aſſured there; that let the future condition of thoſe be as God pleaſes, at leaſt he will not condemn them for invincible ignorance. *For there is no reſpect of perſons with Him; but as many as have ſinned without Law, ſhall periſh without Law.* The meaning whereof is, that the Gentile world ſhall not be judged and condemned for the breach of the law of *Moſes*, which never was given them; but for ſins againſt the law of Nature, and the common light of Conſcience. We may inferr then by parity of argument, That as *many as ſhall ſin without the Goſpel, ſhall periſh without the Goſpel*; that is, not becauſe they believed not in Jeſus, whom they had not the leaſt notice of: but they will be tried and ſentenced for ſins againſt natural Reaſon, for things within their power and capacity; *becauſe when they knew God, they glorified him not, as God; becauſe they held the truth in unrighteouſneſs, ſo that they are without excuſe.* Rom. 2. 11, 12. Rom. 1. 18, 20, 21.

But if the Deiſt ſhall ſtill inſiſt; that though we have juſtified God from the calumny, as if he would condemn the Gentiles for want of impoſſible Faith: yet ſtill he maintains it to be unjuſt and incredible, that while one ſmall part of Mankind enjoys the favour of the Goſpel; all under

the ſtate of Nature ſhall have the hard meaſure of *Summum Jus*; muſt be all damn'd by rigid inflexible Juſtice, without equity or mercy, without any act of pardon, or the leaſt room for Repentance: if he will rather obſtinately believe, or hope, or wiſh; that *the God of tender compaſſions, who loveth all things that he hath made, who will not require much, where little has been given, cannot be ſo extreme* with the Gentile world *as to mark all that is done amiſs*; and yet to ſlight and overlook thoſe ſhining examples of vertue not unfrequent among them. If this be all he ſticks at: God forbid, that on this ſingle account, he ſhould exclude himſelf from the Communion of Faith. We can allow him this opinion; as at worſt a charitable error, as ſome indication of a large heart and a generous love of Mankind. But then he muſt always remember, that even thoſe virtuous Heathens, whom he would ſo gladly place in ſome part of Heaven, can be ſaved on no other account than by the merits and mediation of Jeſus their Saviour. For without his ſatisfaction, there is no remiſſion of ſins nor acceptation of repentance: and without re-
Rom. 3. 20. miſſion of ſins, *by the deeds of the Law*, and natural Righteouſneſs, *no fleſh can be juſtified in the ſight of God.* They are ſaved therefore, if they be ſaved at all, by the ſole benefit of Chriſt; though in this life

life they could not know nor thank their Benefactor. For though they lived in the earlieſt ages of time, long before his Incarnation, yet even then they might be *purified by the blood of the Lamb, manifeſted indeed in latter times, but pre-ordained before the foundation of the world:* ſo that from the firſt origin of it, he might extend and impart, to all that were worthy, the efficacy of his Merits, and the privileges of Faith and Grace, and a ſhare in the inheritance of Glory and Immortality. 1 Pet. 1. 20.

II. And now we may expect, that our Adverſaries will put off the garb and character of Deiſts; and make a new attempt for the fortune of the day, under the arms and conduct of the Jews. II.

It muſt be granted on all hands, that the Meſſias, whenſoever he is manifeſted to the world, muſt appear in that very manner, as the Jewiſh Prophets deſcribe him. All the characters muſt hit and correſpond one to another; the ſame features, the ſame lineaments viſible in both; the one the ſhadow and picture, and the other the ſubſtance. Now, ſay they, it is evident from the Prophets; That the Meſſias is to be a temporal Prince, to ſit on the throne of *David* his royal anceſtor, and to make *Jeruſalem* the ſeat of an

univerſal and perpetual Empire. But the character of Jeſus is as different from this deſcription, as a ſtable from a palace. 'Tis true, we Chriſtians endeavour to ſhew a ſimilitude between them by figurative interpretations of Scripture: which we call the ſpiritual and myſtical ſenſe; but they call arbitrary and precarious, as having no foundation in the native and naked Letter: which is not to be racked and wreſted from its obvious meaning; little credit being to be given to ſuch extorted confeſſions.

Thus far our Objectors. But I ſuppoſe, the Prophetick language and character is better underſtood, than that this ſurmiſe ſhould paſs without a juſt anſwer. Indeed if it were in this caſe alone, that the expreſſions of the Prophets need a figurative interpretation, the exception might appear fair and plauſible. But it cannot be denied, that on many other occaſions, beſides the matter of the Meſſias, their diſcourſe (after the genius of the Eaſtern nations) is thick ſet with metaphor and allegory: the ſame bold compariſons and dithyrambick liberty of ſtile every-where occurr. Which is an eaſie and natural account (beſides the more ſecret reaſons that the Holy Spirit might have) why the kingdom of Meſſias, though really ſpiritual and not of this world, is ſo often dreſſed and painted

painted by them with the glories of ſecular Empire. For when *the ſpirit of God came upon them*, and breathed a new warmth and vigour through all the powers of Body and Soul; when by the influx of divine light the whole ſcene of Chriſt's heavenly kingdom was repreſented to their view; ſo that their hearts were raviſhed with joy, and their imaginations turgid and pregnant with the glorious ideas: then ſurely, if ever, their ſtile would be ſtrong and lofty, full of alluſions to all that is great and magnificent in the kingdoms of this world. But then in other paſſages of the ſame Prophets, as it were on purpoſe to hint to us the true meaning of the former, the Meſſias is deſcrib'd plainly without poetical colours, *to be a perſon of low condition, to have no form nor comelineſs in him, a man acquainted with ſorrows, and numbred among tranſgreſſors*; and by other characters ſo clear and expreſs: that ſome of the Jewiſh Rabbies, to elude ſo ſtrong a conviction, have maintain'd and propagated an abſurd opinion, as if two Meſſiah's were foretold by the Prophets, the one a triumphant monarch, and the other an unfortunate and afflicted perſon. What will not perverſe and refractary minds take hold of, rather than ſubmit to an unwelcome truth?

It is evident then, that the kingdom of Chriſt ſo magnified in the Prophetick ſtile is a ſpiritual kingdom. And yet to be free and ingenuous, we muſt own that the whole nation of the Jews miſtook the meaning of thoſe paſſages. Even our Saviour's own diſciples were not exempted from the common error. And the whole poſterity of that people are pertinacious in it to this day: which to many is a mighty prejudice againſt the credit of the Goſpel. What? as if it were ſuch a matter of aſtoniſhment, that they obſtinately adhere to the literal ſenſe, which promiſes them a temporal kingdom with worldly honours and pleaſures? an interpretation both ſpecious in it ſelf, and agreeable to their proud hopes and carnal apprehenſions, which are miſerably defeated and diſappointed in Jeſus? There ſeems to be nothing ſo very unnatural and unaccountable in this. But then that very Diſappointment, ſo far it is from being an objection, that to a ſagacious mind and uncorrupt judgment, it ſelf is a convincing proof, that he was truly the Meſſias. For let us reflect upon the ſtate of thoſe times. 'Tis certain in fact, that the whole nation was poſſeſt with an inveterate perſuaſion, that the Meſſias was then a coming. And 'tis as certain, that *Jeſus* the Son of *Mary* profeſt himſelf that Meſſias. Let us argue now upon

upon human reaſons and the common principles of action. If he was not the true Meſſias: we are then to conſider him, as an ordinary Jew, of mean quality and education. Now to give any tolerable account, why ſuch a one ſhould pretend himſelf to be the Meſſias, there are but two ways poſſible. Either he was acted by ambitious deſigns, which he hoped to compaſs by that impoſture: or by a complexional and natural enthuſiaſm, verily imagining himſelf to be the Meſſias. I ſuppoſe, I ſcarce need to ſay, that both theſe ſuppoſitions are fully confuted by every word and action of his life. But what I now obſerve, is this; that upon either of thoſe principles, whether Ambition or Enthuſiaſm, he would certainly have acted the part of the Meſſias, in ſuch a character as men then aſſcribed to him; according to the popular expectation, and the received notion of thoſe times. Now the whole Nation expected, that the Meſſias was to be a great General; to reſcue them from the *Roman* power, and *to reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael.* 'Tis certain then, that upon either of thoſe motives, he would have blown the trumpet to rebellion, and attempted their deliverance. Ambition would have animated him to it; as the only way to his hopes and wiſhes: or if Enthuſiaſm had inſpired him, what would he not have promiſed

ſed and aſſumed to himſelf? *to fight the battles of the Lord; to execute vengeance upon the Heathen; to bind their Kings with chains, and their Nobles with fetters of iron.* Such were the deſigns of *Barcocab* and ſome other impoſtors of old: ſetting up to be the Meſſias; they put their followers in arms, and proclaimed liberty to the people. Not ſo the bleſſed Jeſus: but when the multitude would have made him their King, he withdrew himſelf even by miracle to avoid it. He did not ſummon to arms, but to repentance and newneſs of life. He had a kingdom indeed: but *not of this earthly Jeruſalem, but of that which is above.* He was truly their deliverer: but not from the *Roman* yoke; but from the more ſlaviſh yoke of the Law, from the more wretched bondage to ſin and death. Was this the air and language of Ambition? Was this the meen and ſpirit of Enthuſiaſm? Nay rather does not Nature her ſelf cry out and declare; that for one of his low condition and vulgar education, to profeſs himſelf the Meſſias in ſo ſurprizing a manner, in a character ſo unthought of, by an interpretation of Prophecies ſo ſpiritual and divine, ſo infinitely better than the literal meaning, againſt the univerſal prejudice of the nation, and the hopes and ſollicitations of his very followers; was certainly a thing more than human, an invincible teſtimony, that he was really

really the Chriſt, and *his doctrine from God and not of men.*

But our Adverſaries have another objection ſtill behind: and our anſwer thereto will put an end both to it and to the preſent diſcourſe. And this objection is borrow'd from the Law of *Moſes*: which, ſay they, having a promiſe of eternity annexed to it, to be *an everlaſting covenant, a perpetual ſtatute, a covenant of an everlaſting Prieſthood*, ought of neceſſity to be continued and confirmed by the true Meſſias: whereas *Jeſus* endeavoured to aboliſh it, and thereby wholly ſubverted the credit of his own pretenſions. But we anſwer in our Saviour's declaration, *that he came not to deſtroy the Law, but to fulfill it.* Matth. 5. 17. We are to diſtinguiſh then between the moral part of the Moſaic Law, and the political and ceremonial. As to the Rites and Ceremonies; 'tis apparent, they had no intrinſic nor moral holineſs in them; no natural tendency to promote the happineſs of men; nay rather they were inconvenient and grievous, *a yoke of bondage and ſervile diſcipline, which none were able to bear.* Even the rewards and penalties, which enforced their obſervation, did not naturally flow and reſult from them, as effects from proper cauſes; but they were miraculouſly added to them by the ſole virtue of the divine promiſe. 'Tis true, they were fit and

proper for the ends of their inſtitution; to be types and ſhadows of better things to come; to preſerve the people from Idolatry, by allowing no intercourſe nor commerce with other nations. But 'tis evident for that very reaſon, as well as many more, that thoſe ceremonies were neither calculated for eternity, nor modelled for mankind in common. So that when the reaſons of their ſanction no longer continued, when the things they typically repreſented, were come to paſs; when *the wall of partition was to be removed*, and according to the Prophecies, *all nations to be called to Chriſt, and the ends of the earth to be his poſſeſſion*: they muſt needs be antiquated and aboliſhed, like ſcaffolds that are removed when the buildings are finiſhed: ſince under that new ſtate none of them had any further uſe, and ſeveral of them became impoſſible to be obſerved. And ſo for the Political inſtitutions of *Moſes*: 'tis plain they were accommodated to the circumſtances of affairs, and the neceſſities of time and place; not abſolutely the very beſt, but the beſt that thoſe ages of the world and the genius of that people would bear. As for inſtance, the toleration of Polygamy and cauſeleſs Divorces; theſe were indulged them, not as moſt pleaſing to their Law-giver, but *becauſe of the hardneſs of their hearts*, in the words of our Saviour: becauſe they were too

Matth. 19. 8.

ſtiff-

ſtiff-necked and headſtrong to admit of a ſhorter bridle. Theſe civil ordinances therefore, when better precepts were once propoſed and accepted in their place, muſt of neceſſity drop and die of themſelves, and become obſolete without any repeal: juſt as the temporary edicts in war, and the agreements of the cartel do expire of their own accord, when the peace is concluded. But then the Moral part of the law of *Moſes*, which is the ſap and marrow, the ſoul and ſubſtance of the whole, that indeed is of eternal and univerſal obligation. But then, who can ſay, that this is abrogated and cancelled by *Jeſus*? ſo far from that, that every branch of it is ingrafted and incorporated into his Goſpel. In this beſt of ſenſes therefore the Moſaic Law is confirmed and fulfilled by our Saviour. For Morality is a thing immutable; and unleſs human nature it ſelf ſhould be new molded by our maker; vice and virtue muſt be always what they have been. So fooliſh was the cavil of the Deiſts againſt our Saviour's deſcent from Heaven; becauſe he gave no other Lectures of Morals, than what Nature and Reaſon had taught before. Nay if he had taught us the reverſe of thoſe Morals, this had been an objection indeed. But in that even the divinity of his doctrine moſt eminently appears; that the finger of God upon the tables of our hearts, and P. 4.

and the pens of the inſpired Writers in the volume of the Goſpel have preſcribed us one and the ſame leſſon. As for Us, whoſe employment it is to teach that leſſon to others; let us but expreſs it alſo in our own lives and converſations; let us but add that credit to our doctrine, that reputation to our profeſſion: ſo may we expect to bring over all our adverſaries to the truth and power of Religion; ſo may we expect, when we give the account of our talents, to be received with that bleſſed approbation, *Well done, thou good and faithfull ſervant; enter thou into the joy of thy Maſter.*

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